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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4357  
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE 1040  
RUCNCLS/SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC 0528  
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASTANA 000089

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN, DLR/IRF, IO

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [KZ](#)

SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN: OIC SPECIAL ENVOY CUMBER DISCUSSES DEMOCRACY,  
GAZA CONFLICT WITH ASTANA-BASED DIPLOMATS

REF: ASTANA 0083

¶1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

¶2. (SBU) SUMMARY: During a January 9 dinner with U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) Sada Cumber, ambassadors and other diplomats from several OIC-member countries and India freely exchanged views on the pros and cons of the democracy, the current conflict in Gaza, and the need to separate religion from politics. END SUMMARY.

"WHAT GOOD IS A DEMOCRACY?"

¶3. (SBU) On January 9, the Ambassador hosted a dinner with Astana-based diplomats in honor of U.S. Special Envoy to the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) Sada Cumber. The guests were Azerbaijani Ambassador Lyatif Gandilov, Egyptian Ambassador Abdallah Alarnosy, Iraqi Charge d'Affaires Khaldun Aljama, Indian Ambassador Ashok Sajjanhar, and Afghan Embassy Second Secretary Mir Hagjoo. (NOTE: All of the invitees, with exception of Sajjanhar, represent OIC member countries. END NOTE.)

¶4. (SBU) The dinner, which started on courteous and genteel terms, became animated and somewhat emotional as time progressed. The conversation began with a general discussion of the pros and cons of democracy. India's Sajjanhar noted that democracy does not appear overnight, arguing that "the seeds of India's democracy were sown forty years ago." Egypt's Alarnosy asked "What good is a democracy when you have poverty and no security?" Sajjanhar countered that democratic rule is an effective tool against poverty in that it allows people to voice their grievances through the political process, but he conceded that "sometimes the people's expectations grow faster than their income." Cumber contended that lack of political accountability is the greatest obstacle to development facing the Muslim world. He pointed out that despite controlling 82 percent of the world's resource wealth, Muslim countries account for only 8 percent of the world's economic output. The Ambassador summed up the general sentiment that "democracy is, or should be, for the people."

GAZA CONFLICT A HOT TOPIC

¶5. (SBU) Egypt's Alarnosy suddenly shifted gears and declared that

the United States "has a double standard on democracy." "How can you talk about democracy with things like Guantanamo and Gaza?" he charged. Cumber countered that the Muslim world and the United States agree on the need to resolve the conflict in Gaza. India's Sajjanhar agreed, but added that "the vast collateral damage in Gaza only raises the prestige and popularity of Hamas." "This is your democracy!" declared Egypt's Alarnosy emotionally, and added, "The United States has no standing as a moral broker."

¶16. (SBU) Azerbaijan's Gandilov pointed out that there are similarities between the situation in Gaza and Azerbaijan's long-standing dispute with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenia, he claimed, has ignored the UN Security Council resolutions demanding it withdraw from the Azerbaijani territory it has occupied, and the OSCE Minsk group charged with mediating the conflict "has been useless." The root of this 14-year-old conflict, stressed Gandilov, is the contradiction between the principle of self-determination and the principle of territorial integrity. "Our problem needs a global approach, with an objective broker." Why blame the United States, asked Gandilov, for issues that could be resolved with a stronger involvement from the UN?

¶17. (SBU) The Ambassador noted that to resolve such long-standing conflicts, a country's strategic interests must take a back seat to the interests of the people. Egypt's Alarnosy contended that "the world does not want to solve Gaza's problem." Cumber proposed that perhaps Secretary of State-designate Hillary Clinton could "pick up where Bill Clinton left off" in the Israeli peace process. "That will be wholly dependent on Israel," declared Alarnosy, noting with chagrin that until the conflict is resolved, the refugees from Gaza will continue "flowing our way." What the world needs is "democracy on the international level and a complete reorganization of the global economy," he asserted. He conceded Cumber's point, however,

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that the Muslim world has to take on more responsibility and "pull itself up."

RELIGION HAS NO PLACE IN POLITICS

¶18. (SBU) Azerbaijan's Gandilov noted that the Gaza conflict, like many others, is complicated by the "question of God." "Religion has no place in politics," he argued, "because God is one for all, but different for each." He proposed that world leaders abandon "purposeless" summits -- "Leaders hug, but wars continue!" -- and concentrate instead on finding a common language. Gandilov's comments were greeted with emphatic agreement from all. The Ambassador concluded the dinner by thanking the participants for their honesty and candor, noting that world politics needs more of such open exchanges of views.

¶19. (U) Special Envoy Cumber did not/not clear this cable.

HOAGLAND